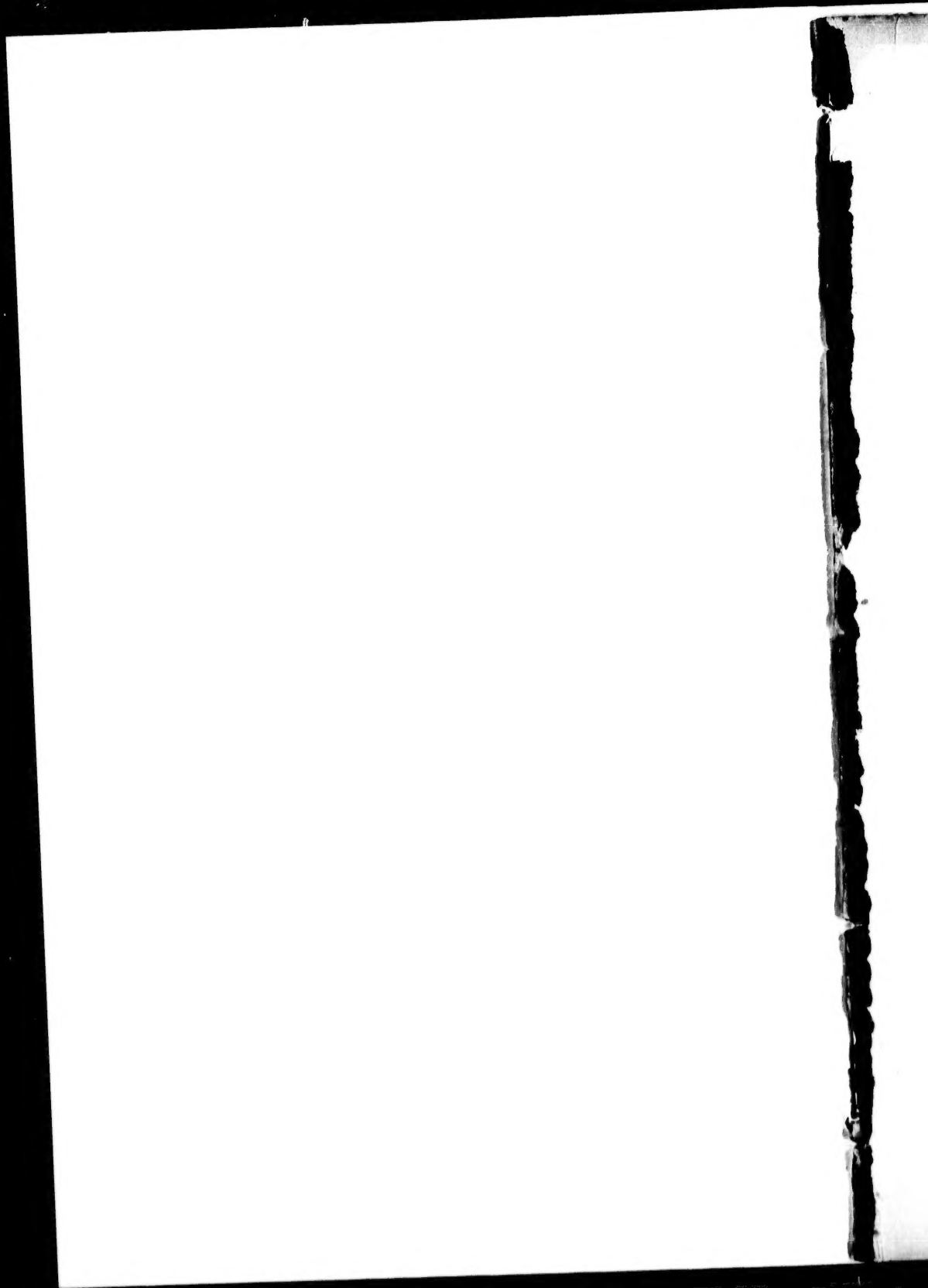




ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. H. BURGESS, *H.B.*

AT THE OPENING OF THE

SECOND WINTER SESSION

OF THE

THREE RIVERS

LITERARY ASSOCIATION,

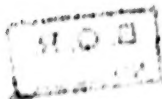
On the 2d November 1842.



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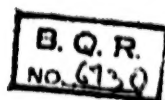
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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.



MR. PRESIDENT.—Now that we are again assembled, after a recess of about six months duration, the first point to be observed is,—to congratulate each other, on our being in good health and spirits; and that we are again enabled to join in the business of the Literary Association of Three Rivers, now met, for the purpose of entering upon its second winter of literary labours. And who among us does not feel, that the bracing cold of a Canadian winter is far more favourable to the prosecution of any intellectual pursuit, than the languor and listlessness induced by the stifling heats of our almost tropical summer? In this respect, the season is to our advantage.

My present purpose, however, is to draw your attention to the condition of this Society, in as far as its literary character is concerned, as well as to the general usefulness of literary institutions of a like nature with our own.

And first, from what has already been accomplished, I am led to argue favourably of the literary aspect of the Association. For, certainly, hardly any of us, about two years ago, could have easily supposed, that this secluded town could afford an audience, sufficiently imbued with a taste for literature, so as to pass an evening, once in each week, in attentively listening to Lectures on scientific subjects, as well as to debates on serious topics of history and morals. But, now that the attempt has been made,—now that we have passed through a season of literary exercises, well considered, and attentively listened to, we need be under no apprehension that our efforts

shall be considered abortive, either through a lack of Lectures or debates, or an audience taking a lively interest in the several subjects discussed and enlarged upon,

I maintain, therefore, from what I have myself heard and witnessed, that there is no probability of our failure in either of these three main elements of our social and intellectual composition, as the Literary Association of Three Rivers.

First, as to the Lectures:—(and I must here regret my distance from this scene of action, which disables me from participating in the business of the Institution, as often as my inclination would otherwise lead me to do;) I shall, therefore, speak only from what I have myself known. What could be more interesting and pleasingly intelligible, than the Lecture delivered last winter on the study of Botany? We must all remember the explanations given of the general structure of flowers and plants; and, from the thousand instances of palpable design exhibited in the floral kingdom, that remarkable one selected by the Lecturer, which he had drawn out at large, for the sake of rendering its peculiar construction more sensibly apparent,—I mean the design of that flower, whose frame enabled it to entrap insects, with all the ingenuity of an understanding will; and, after its particular purpose had been attained, released the distressed prisoners, by withdrawing that vegetable grating, that had so craftily and securely inclosed them. I am not aware of the permanent winter residence of the Doctor; were it in our neighbourhood, it might not, perhaps, be too much to hope, that he would continue to lend his aid occasionally, to set forth more at large, the results of his studies in this particular department of knowledge; seconded, as I know them to be, by an unwearied pursuit after the wonders of vegetable nature, in the forest, in the plain, on the mountain, and among the lakes and streams. A person of his enthusiastic love for botany, and ready talent for communicating what he has ascertained, is not everywhere to be found; still we must not despair, even in this department, for there are others interested in the like pursuit, and their assistance may perhaps be counted upon. If it be not too much to touch upon such a subject, I may merely hint, that the postponement of the period for the necessary registration of our titles and leases, &c. may so far prove a benefit to us, as

by reason of the unexpected leasure afforded, to draw forth the talents of our Registrar, in supplying the absence of our former botanical lecturer—he surely cannot refuse, since a certain sort of smile, we all know, very plainly means—yes.

Again: in the Lecture on Conchology, I am sure I speak the sentiments of all the auditors, when I express the satisfaction derived from listening to a clear and unpretending discourse, elucidated by so splendid a collection of shells as we saw arranged on that table. The very sight alone of such an assemblage of marine curiosities,—their lustre and polish,—their lovely colours,—their strange and interesting forms,—the general design adhered to, in the convolution observed in the structure of the separate classes,—the fan-like radiation of some,—the spiral construction of others,—and the great beauty of all: why, the very display of them, even scattered at random, were a treat; but, when we beheld them arranged in families, associated together by peculiar characteristics of shape, then was an intellectual charm superadded, which was again heightened by the instructive information delivered, respecting the depths and localities, where each happy resident delighted to abide;—to dwell at ease among rocks, on shoals, or in the deepest hollows of the sea;—to lie and await their unfailing sustenance from the inexhaustible stores of Providence, acting in the depths of the waters; from Him, who “openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness.”

The only amendment required in treating these subjects was,—that, instead of compressing so much varied information into one Lecture, let the subject be divided and expanded, the former discourse preparing the way for what is to come,—and the latter, leaning back, as it were, for the elucidation of what is advanced, upon the preparatory instruction delivered in the former. Would the different avocations of the Lecturers permit them to employ this more diffuse method, the gain would be greater to all:—to the Lecturer, in obliging him to think more clearly and closely, and to express himself more minutely and copiously, than a compendious discourse would enable him to do;—and, on the other hand, the audience would be more easily and surely instructed, and far more would be presented for the memory to dwell on, by the indispensable

aid of specimens and draughts. What I have been now mentioning refers to the only Lectures I had it in my power to attend. But I hear, that all were conducted in a similarly creditable manner, with a manifest effect upon those who listened to them. I, therefore, conclude, that we stand in no danger of failure from the want of competent persons to lecture on the different subjects a Society like ours may deem it fitting to discuss. Our aim is improvement and instruction, followed by rational delight; and not the mere pastime and amusements, which may serve to wile away a few, otherwise dull, evening hours: for, when once the mind is really awakened to the true pleasures arising from earnest intellectual contemplation, it is hard to draw it entirely away from such an ennobling pursuit.

2. Our second point for consideration, Mr. President, is the actual state of our Debating Corps, whose ranks, we must allow, have been much thinned, in consequence of the departure of several most active members. Still, even here, if we consider fairly, we need not despair of continued success. For there are still some remaining among us, who are able, and we trust willing, to take an active part in any debate; which, we should remember, is not an off-hand exercise, but is publicly given out, for about a week beforehand. Now, during the interval that elapses between the public notice and the day appointed for the debate, there is ample time allowed to consider the subject; to view its strong and weak points—to refer to history, if it be historical, or to ethical writers, if it be moral—to arrange the argument—to think upon its commencement, its middle, and its sequence; and, lastly, in a solitary walk, to clothe the whole in apt words, which will generally follow the orderly marshalling of our subjects of thought. Such an exercise especially befits the younger portion of our Society, as lecturing does the older: for the Lecture is always presumed to have the character of sure and ascertained knowledge in it; while the debate is on a subject that will admit of a latitude of decision and opposing argument. Thus the debate affords scope to youthful abilities and vigour; to attack and defend; to be ready at reply, and effective in onset; and in this exercise it will be always remarked, that when once the subject has been well and fairly thought upon,—words, which are the vehicles of thoughts,—follow very readily, as the attendant ex-

ponents of our various mental movements. Besides, in every country, blessed with a free constitution, all young men should be able to speak on occasion, in public; and, from the want of some such institutions as this of our debating department, the faculty of public speaking is never exercised: and the inevitable consequence is, that, with few exceptions, the speakers at public assemblies are those hackneyed orators, whose speaking is their trade—and is generally pursued in the spirit of trade—for immediate and tangible gain: while those, who really know what is good to be uttered, and could persuade their auditors, by the reason and force of their materials for speech, hang back in a foolish, unmanly shame-facedness, for want of the timely exercise of that tongue, with which they have been gifted, as well as any, the most ready speakers of the land. Take we our examples from history. All eminent characters, almost, have been remarkable speakers. It was said of Cæsar, “that he spake with the same force with which he fought.” There was the same orderly arrangement of his intellectual means; the same compact and irresistible movement, as when he was fighting at the head of his invincible Roman Legions. His foreign enemies and political opponents felt, and were obliged to acknowledge, his power. His Commentaries are plainly the thoughts, and reasonings, and descriptions of an ancient Roman general.

And, again: our modern Cæsar,—that illustrious Duke, whose name is synonymous with military glory,—is remarkable for his close and forcible speeches in the Senate. He sees as it were, intuitively, the several bearings of his subject, speaks with a manly plainness—a majestic brevity of utterance; and his conclusions are presented in all their force. Here is no nice search for fine and gaudy words, that nauseate a healthy taste; but the language is energetic—the argument compact: and even though you may not agree with him, still you cannot but admit, that he is a fair and formidable warrior in the Senate, though not as uniformly successful as in the field. But I must restrain my speech, lest I should be drawn on to deliver my sentiments on what I deem true and what spurious, oratory—a subject worthy a far abler tongue than mine, and a most attentive audience. For, we must remember, it is by public speaking, in the Senate especially, that the great movements in our outward condition, have been mainly

brought about. The crowded thoughts, and fiery energy of Fox; the clear and luminous and commanding speaking of his great rival Pitt; the playful though keenly-biting satire of Canning, on a later day: these, with the consideration of the methods employed by the great masters of eloquence in the old European world; of Demosthenes in Greece, and of Cicero in the Eternal City: here, I say is a theme that might warm the coldest, one would think, into a superior strain of speech, or of written eloquence!

3. But, Mr. President, my present object warns me to descend to cooler prose, and to a nearer subject, which was our third point to be treated of; i. e. an audience that takes an interest in intellectual pursuits, that can derive delight from the serious consideration of matters not readily within the reach of every man alike. And here again, I shall pronounce, that we are really fortunate. For, during the storms and snow-drifts of last winter's evenings, when the lecturer, while repairing to his appointed post, was, perchance, floundering in the snow,—his mind intent on some astronomical scene;—our room was always well and cheerfully filled. There were no complaints of the bitter cutting of the northern wind:—but the cloaks and the furs were tasked to their respective services; even the distressing bursts of irritating cough seemed charmed and soothed; and all appeared to hang in attentive silence on the lips of the lecturer or speaker. No want of zeal was shewn, in a prompt attendance at the place and hour of meeting; no frivolous excuses were heard;—no; all pressed on, as to a treat, that was agreeable to them. These were the practical proofs, that the evenings occupations were grateful; followed up by more decisive evidence, viz., that of future questioning on the subjects of the evening's discussion. In fact, there is no need for me to dwell upon this topic; since the ready attendance and attention bestowed, on all the subjects offered for notice or debate, were uniformly conspicuous, and are intimately known.

4. I shall, therefore, Mr. President, proceed at once, to my last head of discourse;—the general utility of literary institutions, such as this, to which I have the honor to belong. It requires but little experience to discern readily, the great use of positive institutions of a public and ascertained character,

such as our own. For we all require the stimulus of novelty,—the excitement of what is new and striking to rouse us to make exertion in any one direction. As an example. What person does not know, how beneficial bodily exercise is, what a genial and comfortable glow of circulation follows a long and cheerful ramble over the hills?—have we not felt it ourselves a thousand times?—can we be more convinced, than we are, of the salutary effect of such exertions?—and yet, we know, that in civilized and highly refined society, some of the most active and valuable minds will neglect such efforts, will suffer themselves to be weighed down, into the deep sloughs of spleen and melancholy, because they will not do, what yet they know they ought to do; i. e. get up,—be stirring,—employ the body and mind both;—the body in vigorous and healthful exercise,—the mind in all those sprightly and intellectual employments, which, more than all the drugs that ever were compounded, may eminently be termed—“antibillious;”—for mental exercise bestirs the depths of the soul; drives off all those foolish, unreasonable whims and fears, that the sufferer from hypochondriasis labours under;—and uniting with bodily exertion, renders the man harmonious both in soul and body: while, on the contrary, we see the idle and indolent to be heavy, splenetic, peevish, and altogether dissatisfied both with themselves and all things else. And this is why we see, that persons who retire from active business, so seldom find that ease, they promised themselves, when they were formerly in the height of bustle and occupation. Most often, they are obliged—again to return to what they call business:—i. e. some outward and urgent calls upon their daily attention and exertions. And thus it is, with regard to literary societies. Were all the different subjects there discussed to be sought for only by reading in solitude, the moral certainty is, that we should rarely attend to each. For, we may have the leisure; but of what avail is the amplest leisure, without the spiritual thirst and inclination? and how often the mind is untuned if we trust to our own solitary efforts, we all must know. Hence, we find it necessary to call in the aid of something outward and positive;—some rather public avocation, which,—urging us with a motive, stronger than that of our private and retired thoughts,—may force us, as it were, to act, and thus secure to ourselves a benefit, which we could not, or would not, (for the effect is the same in either case) attain by our own individual

efforts. We all require these moral goads, to stir us on, in any intellectual path. Hence arise such associations as this of ours. For here is a public institution, making demands on us, that even our own pride and sense of propriety will not allow us utterly to neglect. Here is an honest emulation excited, to rouse and bestir ourselves,—each in his separate sphere,—that all may move on harmoniously, and receive an accession of mutual and lasting benefit. And thus, again, Mr. President, the circle of our influence spreads wider, than we can easily imagine, or perhaps, readily believe. For instance ;—any subject handled with force and originality in this literary arena of ours,—calls forth the energies, not only of those who hear, or who partake in the discussion,—but also of those, who are members of kindred societies, in the cities above and below us. For, it is a natural, and a not unworthy feeling,—not to like to be far surpassed, in what we ought, and are considered to be competent masters of. Hence, if it be known, that on any subject, much has been well and ably offered ;—on that very subject, will the lecturer or debater be led on to vie with, or even to excel, what was before attained to and executed. Just as two active lads start off, in sport, in a meadow, and at last persist in a serious straining race ; because each is determined not to be easily conquered. This is a laudable and a virtuous emulation,—innocent in its origin and most beneficial in its results. Thus the member of the society either in Quebec or Montreal, does not like it to be thought, that at the small Town of Three Rivers, any subject proposed for intellectual discussion, shall be more clearly treated, more forcibly argued, or more eloquently set forth to view, than in either of the proud cities : while on the other hand again, we of this humble association shall be as determined, that our little community, shall stand as high, as our own best pains and efforts can fairly and honorably place it. In such a strife, we may with credit say, “ let us yield to none ! ” In this manner, a fair emulation leads to mutual improvement. The lecturer, or debater, or essayist, will think more ; will be more exact ; will enter farther into the spirit of his subject ; will be in a manner carried away by it ;—and then will follow in its natural train, that stream of pure and genuine eloquence, dictated by a deep feeling of the truth or importance of the subject under discussion. For none can be eloquent, on what they do not feel. The practised mind,—as with the touch of the spear of Ithuriel,

detects artificial hypocrisy, and turns away disgusted from it : while what flows freely from the human mind and heart is true and good and acceptable, even though it be not of an eminently exalted grade of power.

And again, Mr. President, in the tone of thought, that is unconsciously spread among those, who frequent our meetings, there is a valuable end gained. For, when we have attended to those pressing and daily calls, which every man must give heed to, if he would be comfortable and happy ;—and which no man can neglect without sorrow and disgrace, and consequent misery ;—I allude to the daily calls of our business or profession, of whatever kind it be ;—there are those gracious hours of heart-felt tranquillity, which the indolent can never know, (for the very repose is the natural reward of toil and fatigue and honest industry ;)—which keep the mind in that happy state, that, the demands of this life being satisfied, we may then honestly provide for our immortal part. Then arises that curiosity, or rather natural thirst for knowledge, which Cicero so nobly pictures ; the desire to see or to hear of that, which is pleasing, or strange, or wonderful ; the travels and voyages of wanderers over the earth and sea ;—the perils and escapes of the suffering sailor or soldier ; the reasonings of the wise and good, on the condition of mankind, and what may be hoped for them hereafter ; the strange discoveries of those, who closely track, and search into, the deep secrets of nature ;—in short, all that lies within the range of the human understanding and heart ; or has been discovered by persevering effort, during the successive generations of mankind. This appetite, we find, grows with our habitual application, and burns and lives on, even to our extremest age ; is a source of never-ending joy, of an enduring pleasure, that injures no one ;—nay, rather is the secret fountain of all beneficial conversation, of all discourse, that is really interesting, and improving, and inspiring. For, the man becomes, unknown to himself, tinged with the mode of thinking, of those noble master-spirits of the world, to whose works he devotes his attentive and earnest mind ; just as,—to use a homely simile, much employed by the poets, the hand of the dyer becomes stained with that peculiar tinge,—which he is accustomed to give to the imbibing cloth. And thus again, even with respect to those, who benefit least, by what they hear, there is a practical sense given to them, of

something in man far nobler, far more worth his cherishing and serious care, than merely his animal nature ;—which in itself is good and excellent, and must be tended—and that with care and thankfulness, though it be inferior to the immortal mind within us. And this is a proper foundation for those higher exercises of the soul, with regard to our contemplations of the glorious world we live in, and what is rationally to be hoped for, by each man after death,—which result in astonishment, and in unfeigned praise and gratitude to the bounteous Lord of all. It is on this account only,—were there no other good gained by our social union,—that I have hitherto proposed my services, and shall continue to render them to this society : since, I consider, there is a high duty discharged, in seriously endeavouring to set forth in a plain and intelligible manner any subject of true and important science ; whatever tends to elevate the general mind and feelings of those, with whom it is our lot to live. Let our aim then be,—never to degenerate ;—not to be content merely with bare amusement ; but rather to be ambitious of genuine instruction ; of desiring to have our views of society and social attainments, i. e. of the sublimities of morals, exemplified in history, or debated upon among us ; or else, the angelic exercises of the human intellect set forth to our minds in the wondrous discoveries perpetually abounding throughout the realms of nature ;—to have such prospects I say, enlarged, accurately extended, and brought into that true point of sight, where all our knowledge shall unite and distinctly harmonize,—displaying clearly to our view, the goodness, the wisdom and the power of that one great Being, who has created us all, in his own good and gracious image !

But to gain this desirable end, Mr. President, each must join heartily in the work : the lecturers and debaters must put no indolent hand to the plough : they must be in earnest. And, on the other hand, the auditors must yield a willing attention to what has been proposed for their instruction and amusement, not without toil and patient thought. Let us each put our shoulder to the wheel ; and we shall then perceive the fabled Hercules to be already descending from the clouds to aid us. If the number of our forces be indeed diminished ; then let those who are left, stand by their colours more closely : the harder the task, the greater will be the glory of success ! Let us shew, that fewer can accomplish, what no numbers

could enable us to do better. Never let it be said, that, had we but striven more earnestly, the society would have prospered and flourished. Rather, let sloth, and backward shame, and all unmanly fears be given to the winds; for none ever fairly dared in the field of wisdom, that were known to be truly and utterly driven back. The ancients feigned for themselves a goddess, who was helpful to all intellectual efforts:—she was of a fair countenance, representing the serene beauty of wisdom, and clad in armour, to imply the adamant force of that wisdom, whether for attack or defence. But we are better taught. We have disclosed to us, the one, living, eternal source “of all utterance and of all knowledge,”—who giveth wisdom “to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” Relying on this sure strength, we will commence our season of literary labours without fear and doubtfulness;—being sure of an ample harvest, if He only shall deign to bless our humble endeavours.

Three Rivers, 2nd November, 1842.

FINIS.